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ABSTRACT

This study compares what motivates beginning and senior education students to want to become teachers in the present time when teaching positions are limited. Using a questionnaire adapted from an earlier study conducted in 1976, students in an introductory education class and senior students in the midst of their student teaching phase were surveyed. It was found that the trend of the lack of teaching positions is matched by a trend of students selecting teaching based on intrinsic and altruistic motives. Compared to students in 1976, the students of the beginning 1980s were found to be even more interested in the intrinsic rewards of teaching, more likely to model their teachers, and less likely to be affected by relatives in their career choice. Beginning students tended to be motivated by liking for children, while graduating seniors tended to be motivated by criticism of schools and a desire to change and influence schools through teaching. Some implications for teacher education drawn from the results of this study are discussed. (JD)

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# What Motivates Introductory and Senior Education Students to Become Teachers

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## Abstract

This study compared what motivated beginning and senior educational students to teach in the present time when teaching positions are limited. It was found that students were motivated to teach by intrinsic and altruistic reasons. A comparison of the motivational patterns between beginning and senior, elementary and secondary educational students provided a number of implications for teacher educators.

# What Motivates Introductory and Senior Education Students to Become Teachers

In the November/December 1978 issue of Journal of Teacher Education, Karlyn Wood investigated the factors that prompted educational students to select teaching careers. In the present era, when teaching positions are difficult to obtain, it is intriguing to witness continuously a sizable number of students who still enroll in colleges of education and look forward to a teaching career. Wood's study explored the factors that motivated students of the 70's to seek entry into this limited professional field as compared to their predecessors who could select from among many available teaching positions in a period of teacher scarcity.

The present study is a sequel to Wood's study, and compares what motivated beginning and senior educational students to teach in the beginning of the 1980's. The present study intends to investigate if Wood's finding that the students of the 1970's were more likely to be motivated by intrinsic reasons to teaching is a continuous trend that carries to the 1980's. In addition, if the trend of intrinsic motivation for teaching is the direct result of lacking of extrinsic rewards, one would expect that the further decline of available teaching positions in the 1980's must be matched by increased intrinsic motivation for those who decide to embark upon a teaching career. Finally, the present study intends to compare the reasons beginning and senior educational students had for selecting teaching as a career.

Introductory educational students tend to be idealistic, and are only exploring the field of education as a possible career option. Senior educational students who are in the midst of their student teaching, on the other hand, usually have a much stronger commitment to teaching as well as a more realistic expectation of the prospective job market. It is conceivable that introductory and senior educational students are motivated to enter teaching because of different reasons.

## Wood's and Earlier Studies

Wood's study employed 52 introductory educational students at the SUNY, College of Old Westbury, who were interested in elementary or early childhood education. To a question: "What prompted you to become a teacher?", the most commonly cited reasons among this group of students were, in descending frequency, "personal experience with children," "liking for children," and "altruistic reasons." Following those three most commonly cited reasons were some lesser reasons: "relative's influence," "criticism of schools," "advantages of the job," "former teachers' influence," and "liking for school and learning" in descending frequency.

Wood's study revealed that personal and inner reasons, as compared to external reasons, exerted the greatest influence in prompting 1970's students to teach. As compared to earlier studies with pre-1970's students, there seemed to be a changing trend of what affected students' selection of teaching as a career. Fielstra (1955) found that the three highest ranking reasons all related to outside influences ("teachers," "other people" and "news articles"). Haubrich (1960) reported that extrinsic values such as "job security" and "professional standing" motivated 1957's students

to teach. Intrinsic reasons such as "wanting to help children" and "personal adjustment" became the primary motivating factors in Richards' study of 1960. This changing trend became even more obvious in Fox's (1960) and Saxe's (1969) studies which found that altruistic causes and intrinsic reasons were the principal reasons for students' selection of a teaching career.

Both Haubrich and Richards have stressed the importance of comparative study of motivating factors over a period of time, in order to differentiate between those who successfully complete the teacher training and those who transfer, withdraw or are dismissed. Haubrich also mentioned the need to study the relationship between initial motives and the length of staying in the actual teaching profession, so that some device might be developed to screen or to counsel prospective teachers. All the studies mentioned above either were conducted with beginning educational students, or made no attempt to compare the motives between beginning and graduating senior educational students. The present study intends to examine if there are different motivational patterns between those who are exploring the teaching field, and those who have almost successfully completed their training in teacher education. Finally, the present study will also compare the motives of those who are interested in elementary and/or early childhood education, and those in secondary education.

Las Cruces Study

During the later part of the Spring semester in 1980, 104 students in several sections of an introductory education class and 71 senior students in the midst of their student teaching phase were asked to respond to a survey on a voluntary and anonymous basis. This introductory class was open to

all freshmen and sophomores for their career exploration, whereas those in student teaching were in the last phase in the teacher training. All the student-teachers were graduating seniors who had at least 100 semester hours with a minimum of a B average in educational courses, plus some practical experience in the classroom.

The survey questionnaire was adapted from Wood's study. Students were asked to rank order the nine commonly cited reasons given by educational students as to what motivated them to select teaching. Eight of the nine reasons were taken from Wood's study with slight modification. They were:

-Liking for school and learning (always enjoyed school; love for learning)

-Former teachers (encouragement and inspiration to teaching by the role model of former teacher/teachers)

-Altruistic reasons (desire to help, to share, and contribute to education)

-Advantages of the job (summer vacation; mobility; convenient and reasonable hours; good pay; challenges and stimulating aspects of teaching)

-Liking for children and youth (enjoying, liking and desiring to be with children and youth)

-Relatives' and friends' influences and encouragement (such as father, mother, uncles, aunts, siblings, spouse and friends)

-Criticism of schools (schools need improvement; wanting to make necessary changes in schools; wanting to influence schools and society through teaching)

-Personal experiences with children and youth (experiences of caring for children and youth; babysitting; observing neighbor's kids; own siblings; teaching in private and Sunday Schools)

One additional reason was added, which stated: "Lack of alternative career choices (don't know what else to do; don't really know why I am here; it is easier academically compared to other options"). This last reason was added because it was thought that it might be a motive for some students during a time of recession. The order of those nine reasons was randomized in the survey. The survey also allowed students to list any other reasons they might have had.

Inquiry Results

The rank order scores students gave to each of the nine reasons were averaged. Based on these means, rank orders were determined (see Table 1). Using the rank order that was selected by the biggest percentage of students in each category, and by using the percentage of students who selected a given reason as the most important reason yielded very similar ranking orders to that obtained from the means. The further comparative analyses were conducted based on the means.

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Insert Table 1 about here

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As compared to Wood's study, students in the present study were more likely to cite "personal liking of children," and "altruistic reasons" as primary motivational factors for selecting teaching careers. The ranking

of "personal experience with children" in the present study, although lower than that in Wood's study, was still one of the three most influential factors. The discrepancy between the present study and Wood's study became more noticeable as one examined some less important reasons. Students in the present study rated "relatives' influence" as one of the least important, and "liking for school and learning" as well as "former teacher's influence" as fairly important factors in their career decision-making, whereas in Wood's study students rated "relatives' influence" as fairly important, and "liking for school" as well as "former teacher's influence" the least important. The present study found that the only added reason, i.e., "lack of other career options," turned out to be by far the least important motive.

Comparing introductory students' ranking orders to those of the senior students', it was found that seniors tended to rate "criticism of school" more important whereas the beginning students tended to rate "liking for children" and "personal experience with children" as more important. Comparing means of early childhood and elementary students to that of secondary students, it was found that early childhood and elementary students tended to rate "liking for children" as well as "personal experience with children" more important whereas secondary students tended to rate "former teacher's influence" as more important. Those who intended to teach both elementary and secondary classes and those who could not decide on one were excluded from this part of the analysis. No sex difference was found.

Only 25 students filled free responses to provide additional reasons. Nine of the students stated one reason or another which was actually covered by one of the nine reasons presented. Fourteen students cited that they wanted to get teaching certificates so that they could coach sports programs in the

school.

Conclusion and Discussion

Since Wood's (1976-77) study, the employment picture has not improved for educational graduates. In fact, the 1980's have been predicted as an era in which the employment situation may worsen until it bottoms out. It is interesting to note that despite such a dismal employment situation, many qualified students continue to prepare themselves for teaching. The present study supports Wood's study in that the trend of lacking teaching positions is matched by a trend of students selecting teaching based on intrinsic and altruistic motives. Compared to students of 1976-77 reported in Wood's study, the students of the beginning 80's were found to be even more interested in intrinsic rewards of teaching, learning and interaction with children; they were more likely to model their teachers and less likely to be affected by their relatives. Lack of other alternatives and the "easiness" of getting through the educational program did not seem to be the factors that attracted them into education at all.

This study also provides some answers to questions asked in Wood's study. Wood wondered if former teachers would no longer inspire their students into teaching. Former teachers apparently still can inspire their students and serve as role models for future teachers, as demonstrated in this study. The discrepancy between Wood's study, which found "experience with children" the most important reason, and earlier studies, which found that students attributed far less importance to their personal experiences can also be explained. The specific experience with children and youth may

be one single element that contributes to the general "liking of children and youth" which appears to be the most important reason why a person selects teaching. These discrepancies between Wood's and other studies may be partially due to changing times and partially due to the way Wood's study was conducted. Fifty-two students in her study only gave 73 responses. As there may be many factors that shape a person's decision-making, her students might not have had the opportunity to list all the reasons that motivated them to teach.

This study has a number of implications for teacher education. First of all, although the stated motives for selecting teaching seem to be more similar than different between elementary and secondary students, and between beginning and graduating students, there are, however, some different patterns worthwhile noting. Beginning students tended to be motivated by "liking for children" and "experience with children" whereas graduating seniors tended to be motivated by "criticisms of schools" and their desires to change and influence schools through teaching. Perhaps more exposure to the teaching field made the seniors more realistic about what to expect in teaching. It is also possible that those with extrinsic motives might be more likely to transfer or drop-out of the teacher training, whereas those with critical views of schools and altruistic motives might be more likely to persist through the training. Due to the correlational nature of the data, one can not be certain of causal factors. However, the study clearly points out the needs for counseling educational students and for introducing them to what can be expected realistically of teaching. The picture to be presented to them does not have to be a dismal one at the present time of limited

teaching positions. In fact, the intrinsic aspects of teaching, such as personal enjoyment of teaching and meaningful interaction with children, are obviously very influential in students' decision-making, and should be the center of the picture.

When educators become involved in advisory and counseling roles, they should be sensitive to the varying patterns of motivation between elementary and secondary education students. "Liking for children" and "personal experience with children" affected elementary and early childhood education students more, and "former teacher's influence" affected secondary education students more. Educators should take heart that we are still significant role models who affect the career selections of young people. It is a great responsibility for teacher educators to keep high the obvious level of intrinsic altruism that presently exists among students. At a time of limited teaching positions along with their unfavorable material benefits as compared to many other professions, the educational administrators and policy makers should realize what motivates students to teach, and should work on structuring the teaching environment to enhance the intrinsic rewards of the classroom so that those who come to this profession will find what they look for in teaching.

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Table 1

Means of the ranking scores regarding reasons for becoming a teacher

| Response Category | Rank Order in Wood's Study N=52 | Means of Ranking Scores of all students N=175 | Introductory Education Students N=104 | | Senior Education Students N=71 | Elementary Education Students N=90 | | Secondary Education Students N=57 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Liking for children and youth | 2 | 2.28 | 2.01 | * | 2.66 | 1.82 | ** | 3.04 |
| 2. Altruistic reasons | 3 | 3.20 | 3.28 | | 3.07 | 3.25 | | 3.21 |
| 3. Personal experience with children and youth | 1 | 3.85 | 3.39 | ** | 4.52 | 3.50 | * | 4.49 |
| 4. Liking for school and learning | 7.5 | 4.59 | 4.47 | | 4.77 | 4.47 | | 4.78 |
| 5. Former teachers | 7.5 | 4.77 | 4.51 | | 5.15 | 5.23 | ** | 3.98 |
| 6. Criticism of schools | 5 | 5.68 | 6.16 | ** | 4.97 | 5.71 | | 5.54 |
| 7. Advantages of the job | 6 | 6.05 | 6.05 | | 6.04 | 6.14 | | 5.70 |
| 8. Relative influences | 4 | 6.65 | 6.62 | | 6.69 | 6.88 | | 6.22 |
| 9. Lacking alternatives | NA | 8.61 | 5.72 | | 8.43 | 8.75 | | 8.43 |

*difference significant at 0.05 level (t tests)
** difference significant at 0.01 level (t tests)